

Extracts from the CIA Publication,
"A Review of the Situation in Vietnam"
dated 8 December 1967

Declassified by

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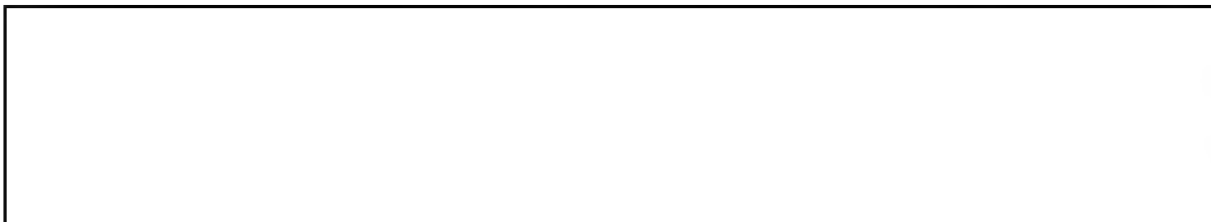
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Extracted from the CIA Publication "A Re^{view} of The Situation In Vietnam"
dated 8 December 1967, [REDACTED]

Section III. Pages III-1 thru III-3:

III. COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Force Levels

1. The strength of Communist forces in regular combat units in South Vietnam is estimated at approximately 118,000, of whom some 54,000 are in North Vietnamese Army units and 64,000 in Viet Cong main or local force units. In addition, there are estimated to be at least 35,000-40,000 administrative support troops who back up the combat regulars. The strength of Viet Cong village and hamlet guerrillas is believed to be in the 70,000-90,000 range. The combined total of these forces is estimated at between 223,000 and 248,000.



3. It is also possible that our estimate of the number of North Vietnamese Army troops within the total strength figure for the regular combat units is low. Captured documents and prisoner interrogations indicate that an increasing number of North Vietnamese soldiers are serving as replacements in regular Viet Cong units. A study in late 1966 of Viet Cong forces in the III Corps area north of Saigon revealed that in some units at least 23 percent of the personnel were North Vietnamese Army infiltrators. This percentage is probably higher now, and Viet Cong units in I and II Corps probably contain a correspondingly greater percentage of northerners--perhaps 50 percent in some instances.

4. There is no evidence that North Vietnamese Army troops are present in significant numbers in the delta, or among the guerrilla force, although a few may be serving as cadres or advisors.

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5. Apart from the military forces described above, the Communists make a strong effort to organize much of the total manpower under their control into various work forces and semimilitary organizations. Among the most significant of these organizations are the local "self-defense" forces. These units are mainly charged with the protection--in a defensive sense--of Viet Cong - controlled villages and hamlets. They apparently do not participate very often in offensive operations against allied forces. Moreover, the self-defense forces include a large number of people of both sexes who normally would not be fit for regular combat duty. Some have firearms, but many others do not. They are only partially trained, and usually do not serve full time. Their existence, however, poses an impediment to allied sweeps and pacification, and they do inflict casualties on allied forces.

6. There is no officially accepted estimate of the strength of these self-defense forces. However, Communist documents indicate that the enemy estimated their strength in early 1966 at around 150,000. They probably have suffered some attrition since that time, both from casualties and by the induction of some self-defense personnel into the regular armed forces or the guerrilla forces.

Effects of Losses and Recruiting Problems

7. During the past year Communist manpower problems within South Vietnam have become more serious as their loss rates have increased and their ability to recruit in the South has diminished. Analysis of loss and recruitment data suggests that the Communist force level, which increased substantially during 1965 and 1966, probably has stabilized or possibly has been reduced somewhat during 1967.

8. It is difficult to assess the exact extent to which Communist force strengths in South Vietnam have declined over the past year and any estimate of these losses is subject to wide margins of error. It is clear that most of the decline is at the lower levels of the Communist structure. This is due not only to increased casualties, but to the Communist practice of drawing on the lower levels to help

maintain the strength of Regular Force units. There is some evidence that guerrilla forces have declined considerably in some provinces where allied activity has been most intense. In other areas, particularly in IV Corps, the guerrilla structure may be almost as solid as before.

9. The number of VC troops in Administrative Service Units has probably also declined from a year ago. This assumption is based on the increased share of combat being assumed by North Vietnamese Army units; the need to use administrative service troops; to provide combat replacements; and the increasing tendency of main and local force troops to perform more of their own logistical support.

10. Increasing casualties, illness, and other hardships are known to be causing considerable morale problems for both Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops. The number of Viet Cong returnees under the Chieu Hoi program this year is well above last year's total, although the rate for the past seven or eight weeks has dipped below the comparable period last year. Prisoners and documents also indicate that desertions are a growing problem.

11. As of 1 December, the US military command in Saigon estimated that only 85 to 115 of the 194 enemy maneuver battalions accepted in the official order of battle are combat effective; the remainder are listed as ineffective or marginally effective. Judgments on combat effectiveness are admittedly arbitrary, however, and are subject to rapid individual change as enemy units receive replacements and new supplies.

Conclusion

12. Although the manpower problem apparently has been more acute in 1967 than previously, it has not been grave enough to erode the over-all ability of the Communists to continue the war. While their losses have been heavy and they face increasing recruiting difficulties in the South, they retain sufficient initiative to control their casualty rate and have the ability to maintain, and increase if necessary, the level of infiltration from North Vietnam. Finally, the infrastructure--the political cadre and Viet Cong government--which the fighting forces must protect, remains relatively intact.